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One Copy Only - this one. Eyes Alone for Mr. McCone.
13 May 1962

MEMORANDUM FOR RECORD ON WHITE HOUSE MEETING AT 10:30,
12 MAY, AND 1:30, 12 MAY

1. In the absence of Mr. McCone, I represented CIA at both meetings. Present were the President, the Vice President, Secretary Rusk, Secretary McNamara, the Attorney General, General Taylor, Mr. Harriman, General Lemnitzer, Secretary Gilpatric, Secretary Ball, Mr. Bohlen, General Decker, Mr. McGeorge Bundy, Mr. Forrestal, Mr. Hilsman, and myself. (In this connection, the President subsequently indicated that he did not want the membership at this meeting in any way divulged to anyone, with particular emphasis on the presence of the Attorney General.) The attendance at the afternoon meeting was the same with the exception of Mr. Harriman and General Decker, both of whom were absent.

2. The President indicated that he was most upset at the Frankel story in the New York Times. He asked Mr. Rusk to open the meeting and Rusk asked for a CIA briefing. I told the group that as of that moment there were no real developments since yesterday and that our latest information indicated a withdrawal of the government troops across the river and their probable ^{later} movement to southern Laos for regrouping and re-equipping. At this point Secretary McNamara, who had just returned from Southeast Asia, took over and brought all of us up to date on what he had seen and what his views were.

3. Mr. McNamara indicated that Nam Tha had been improperly defended, that twice the force needed for defense was there, but that they were improperly deployed. He stated that the government defeat was a military disaster and that there were only a thousand of the original six thousand ^{the} in Thailand, that there was no sense of regrouping or re-equipping there and that a military force no longer existed. He said that the two Lao generals had left Nam Tha without even telling the U. S. MAAG advisers, and that relations were very poor between the government generals and the MAAG advisers. He also stated that the situation in the panhandle was very poor militarily. Secretary McNamara stated that he was discouraged with conditions in Thailand, there were no real Thai forces in the Northeast, and that Sarit was greatly concerned about the situation. Sarit had very poor intelligence and very poor communications. Sarit thinks the Chinese are setting up an independent logistical and communication channel to the

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sea through Southeast Asia. McNamara said the Thais have no civil guard, no defense corps, and they are quite vulnerable to the type of infiltration that Laos has undergone. He said, however, there appeared to be no real indication at this time of such infiltration. As to South Vietnam, McNamara felt much more encouraged. Desertions in the South had been considerably reduced and the troops were more effective. The strategic hamlet program was going very well and there had not yet been a successful effort against the hamlets. Civil guard and training programs were good and there had been no lost weapons since the program was started. Large-scale Viet Cong attacks have ceased. While we are years from any real security there, we are heading in the right direction. McNamara said we need substantially the same thing in Thailand and Sarit needs continuing bolstering.

4. McNamara then stated that he saw no need to implement Plan Five at this time, but he felt that in Thailand we should bring the U. S. battle group up to strength and move it north (he did not know yet where or how far), to add a battalion landing team of U. S. Marines, and two U. S. air squadrons. (He was not quite clear as to where these additional forces were to go but they are covered in a subsequent message sent by the Joint Chiefs of Staff.) Mr. McNamara closed by stating that if any U. S. action was contemplated in Laos, we must definitely put forces in South Vietnam to help them against North Vietnam.

5. There then followed a discussion by the President and General Decker as to what troops were available where, and how long it would take to move them into Southeast Asia. The President asked Secretary McNamara for a program of various military steps that might be taken by the U. S. as to troops, deployments, times, etc. He stated that this is an extremely serious situation and that we are not in any way fooling around or messing around with a "show of force." Whatever we do, we mean business. He asked Secretary Rusk to prepare an estimate of just how the SEATO nations would react either by our unilateral actions or by our request to them to join with us. (Mr. Hilsman is doing this in the State Department and assured me subsequently that he would have his people work with our people on it. He stated it was not a matter for USIB, that the President had, after the meeting, personally directed him to have it done in the State Department, and that he (Mr. Hilsman) did not think the military need be involved.)

6. Mr. Rusk stated that whatever we do militarily, we must do with enough firmness and enough force to convince the Soviets that we really mean business.

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7. Mr. Harriman stated that a number of people felt that the President's program had been undermined by the CIA and by the military and that the Soviets unquestionably felt this too. He said that several reporters had brought this up to him and that it was Soviet belief that the President's program had been undermined by CIA and the military. Harriman said that Phoumi was definitely provocative and unresponsive to the U. S., and that we should send a telegram to Vientiane to encourage ferment, and do everything we could to downgrade Phoumi. Harriman said that whether the decision was political or military, we had to avoid indicating any further help to Phoumi.

8. The President said that the Soviets would find it hard to believe that we could not control our own man, Phoumi. Bohlen agreed and felt that the Russians would just hold back and watch what went on without making any commitment to intervene.

9. Hilsman stated that we must not do anything to vindicate Phoumi. We must make unprovocative military moves and must disavow Phoumi hard by all U. S. elements both here and abroad. We could then follow this disavowal by military moves which could not be connected to support of Phoumi.

10. Lemnitzer said if not Phoumi, who then? He stated that the bulk of the Lao forces are in the South and still intact and still under Phoumi's command. Mr. McNamara interjected that Phoumi is already pretty well discredited in Laos.

11. Rusk said we should start by making our military moves in Thailand and South Vietnam and certainly not in Laos.

12. The President, referring to the Frankel story again, said, "What do we say to the press? What message are we trying to get to whom, and for what purpose?" Rusk volunteered to work up a press approach for the afternoon meeting on the basis that we were taking precautionary moves. The President indicated that whatever we do, we must touch base with the House leadership of both parties. The morning meeting broke up with instructions to reconvene at 1330. At this point, Mr. Hilsman gave the President, "This is the study on Formosa we discussed yesterday, Mr. President." After the morning meeting, Mr. Harriman asked me to

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get a message out to our people to do whatever we could to discredit Phoumi by working through the head of Phoumi's Secret Intelligence. (I did not catch the name but it was a short name beginning with [redacted] (b)(3) General Lemnitzer and I both cornered Mr. Harriman and took exception to his remarks about CIA and the military. General Lemnitzer was visibly upset and I am afraid I looked likewise. Mr. Harriman reiterated that he was merely passing on matters that had been discussed with him by reporters and that this would be the Soviet view but not his. He had no intention of implying anything else. He could not be pinned down as to what reporters, but he did state categorically that at no time did he personally think or have knowledge of any undercutting of the President's program by the military or by CIA. He did state that [redacted] had given exceptional support to Phoumi which perhaps had the effect of undermining the President's program, although he admitted that supporting Phoumi was [redacted] mission.

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1:30 MEETING

1. At the afternoon meeting Secretary McNamara tabled a message of instructions to CINCPAC, calling for the additional deployment of U. S. forces to Southeast Asia, and establishing the command of all these forces under General Harkins. I did not get a copy of this message but it is available if required. I have asked the Watch Officer to try to get a copy sent to your quarters direct. State Department (Hilsman) questioned why we had to bring up a change in command. After considerable discussion, it was decided to try to play this fact in low key but unquestionably the news would get it.
2. Rusk indicated that he was most anxious to get the New Zealanders and the Australians in the act and would see what they could do about this. Hilsman tabled a copy of comments which would be made for press guidance. After some changes and further guidance by the President, this was also approved. The guidance given was substantially in accordance with the story in this morning's Washington Post. I did not get a copy of this either but it can be made available if required.
3. Finally, the President asked for the Intelligence Estimate he had previously requested on SEATO countries by Monday. He further wanted an Intelligence Estimate on the current posture of military forces in Laos, to include their effectiveness after losses, their leadership, their deployment, etc. He also wanted more information on what actually happened at

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Nam Tha. The President also asked Hilsman how he was coming on that "White Paper on Laos" and Hilsman said it was in the typewriter and would probably be available Monday.

4. In subsequent discussion with Hilsman, he was adamant to me and in fact said that the President had personally told him after the meeting that the Estimate on SEATO countries was to be prepared by State Department and was not a USIB matter. (I had touched base with Bundy who said it was a USIB matter.) Hilsman said he would have his people coordinate the paper with our National Estimates people. I have no knowledge of any "White Paper on Laos" and would certainly think that this should be thoroughly coordinated with our Agency and with the Department of Defense, in particular the Joint Chiefs of Staff. I have our Estimates people working on the military situation in Laos and told them to go as far afield as they felt desirable and not be restricted by the term "military." They should have a paper ready for a USIB meeting tomorrow morning, Monday, at 10:30, and we may get advanced copies tonight about dinner time.

5. Finally, I invite your most urgent attention and consideration to the State Department cable dispatched to the Embassy in Vientiane, #987, at 9:55 p.m., last night and to my handwritten note attached thereto. I particularly invite your attention to [redacted] reaction to this message.

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